

TRADITION UNVEILED:

OR,

AN EXPOSITION OF THE PRETENSIONS
AND TENDENCY

OF

AUTHORITATIVE TEACHING IN THE CHURCH.

BY THE

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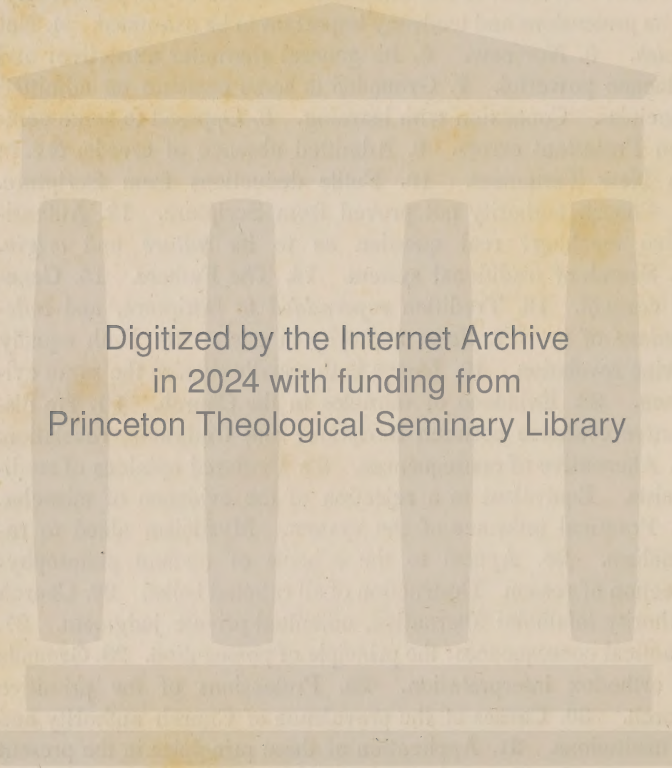
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ARGUMENT.

1. INTRODUCTORY remarks. 2. Prevalence of a system of authoritative tradition in the Church of England at the present day. 3. Its pretensions and tendency important to be examined. 4. Not *popish*. 5. Nor new. 6. Its general character attractive: and influence powerful. 7. Grounded in some measure on admitted principles. Connexion with learning. 8. Opposed to some common Protestant errors. 9. Admitted absence of creeds, &c. in the New Testament. 10. Futile deductions from Scripture. 11. Church authority not proved from Scripture. 12. Authoritative teaching: real question as to its *nature* and *origin*. 13. Sketch of traditional system. 14. The Fathers. 15. General consent. 16. Tradition *superadded* to Scripture, and *independant* of it. 17. *Same* authority in each. 18. Both equally Divine revelation. 19. Hence both equally require the same evidence. 20. Evidence of miracles in the Church. 21. No distinctive evidence between Scriptural and traditional revelation. 22. Alternative of consequences. 23. Declared opinions of traditionists. Equivalent to a rejection of the evidence of miracles. 24. Practical influence of the system. Mysticism allied to rationalism. 25. Appeal to the schools of ancient philosophy: rejection of reason. Destruction of all rational belief. 26. Church authority infallible: alternative, unlimited private judgment. 27. Practical consequences: the principle of persecution. 28. Grounds of orthodox interpretation. 29. Pretensions of the primitive church. 30. Causes of the prevalence of Church authority and its institutions. 31. Application of these principles in the present times. 32. Hostility of the traditionists towards science. 33. Conclusion: importance and real bearing of the question. Necessity for evidence of revelation. 34. Authenticity of the New Testament. Evidence addressed to reason. 35. Legitimate deference to authority. Use of formularies and Church institutions. 36. Formalism and superstition. 37. Truth and conviction. Exercise of private judgment.



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TRADITION UNVEILED,

&c.

(1.) AMID the innumerable matters of stirring interest which are continually soliciting public attention in the present times, amid the excitement of political contests, of literary discussion, of scientific discovery, and the more popular and practical subjects of religious controversy—it is not a little remarkable that such a topic as is supplied by the abstract theological speculations, the devotional practices, and ecclesiastical schemes of a few secluded academics, should be able to acquire general notoriety, and inspire an interest not merely within the precincts of their colleges and the limited circle of their brother theologians, but among the great body of the clergy and even of the laity, throughout the country.

Yet such an instance is brought before us at the present time. A certain body of theological opinions has been put forth and advocated by the combined efforts of a few individuals of some reputation in the university of Oxford; opinions which, from their nature, might appear ill calculated to extend themselves much beyond that particular circle in which they originated. Yet contrary to all that might have been anticipated, we find that the subject has unquestionably, in one shape or another, attracted no inconsiderable degree of public attention. There are few (at least of those who

take any interest in what is passing around them in the world of theological, or even political discussion) who have not heard something of these questions. Those periodicals which are chiefly devoted to religious and theological subjects, have been full of them. Those not usually so occupied, have yet thought it worth their while to bestow frequent attention upon them. Even the daily journals have from time to time resounded with the mention of the "Oxford tracts," and the names of their principal supporters. There have gone forth among the public at large, impressions of the existence, organization, and growth of principles, and a party of the most dangerous tendency, originating within the pale of the church, and extending even to both the ancient universities. They are commonly supposed to aim at little less than the complete revival of ecclesiastical authority and discipline, long consigned to oblivion; and a gradual, or if possible, an immediate restitution of the very spirit, if not the actual letter, of Romish superstition and papal despotism.

In confirmation of these ideas, reference is made to the avowed opinions of this party, proclaimed in print, to the republication of ancient popish, or semi-popish documents and rituals, to the recommendation of them by modern comments and panegyrics. Much is also heard of the real or supposed secret influence excited by some leading zealots upon their devoted followers, both in the university and out of it. Reports are in circulation of secret meetings, and discussions in deep conclave, among the leaders and the initiated; of assemblies of a more popular character suited to the mass of disciples; of means used with great skill and discrimination of character to entice and entrap novices of promising talents. Whispers, moreover, are heard of the profoundly austere exercises of the more advanced;

of the rigorous observance of the ordinances of the church; of private assemblies for daily service at early matins and late vespers; of the restoration of obsolete practices in the church services; of vestments and crosses; of postures and bowings. Mysterious hints are heard of the asceticism of the more deeply initiated—of days spent in rigorous fastings—of nights passed in vigils or on the bare floor—of secret penances and macerations of the flesh. All this and much more is suspected or imagined, perhaps with little foundation. Yet, from the very nature of the case, impossible to be absolutely ascertained; but on that very account, perhaps only the more generally reported and implicitly believed.

(2.) But however mistaken some of the notions, or exaggerated the reports which prevail on the subject, it is not the less certain that there does exist considerable ground for some such statements; and certainly ample reason for making a close inquiry into the facts of the case. It is clear, from published authorities, that opinions and views of theology (of at least a very marked and peculiar kind, applying more especially to the subject of church authority and others dependent on it,) have been extensively adopted and strenuously upheld, and are daily gaining ground among a considerable and influential portion of the members, as well as ministers, of the established church.

Nor will this be surprising, if we look to the variety of motives which may concur in influencing men's minds in the reception of such views. From what we have already observed, it is manifest that the principles inculcated possess many claims on popular notice and public attention; and the more we look into the character of the tenets professed, the more shall we perceive

what a powerful hold they are likely, from their nature, to maintain. It requires but little knowledge of the present and past state of religious parties, to perceive that there are a multitude of already existing prepossessions, of old established associations, and long cherished feelings and prejudices, which, as far as they go, chime in admirably with the opinions in question; and form an excellent ground-work on which the advocates of the cause may successfully advance their superstructure.

When these opinions are more closely examined, it will become more clearly evident that they are (at least in numerous instances) far from being new to "Anglican" theology. It is true, that they may have lately received a more full and striking development: but in point of fact, among the well known and old established section of the establishment, commonly designated as the "high church" party, views, at least substantially the same, have been for centuries past professed; and if not always so openly and broadly avowed, yet privately held and taught, and clearly to be traced on a careful examination of the writings of some of the "acknowledged and approved" fathers of the English church.

Thus, it will be apparent that there are various parties already prepared to recognise these views, at least, up to a certain point. While it will be found that the doctrines themselves are of such a nature as to allow of considerable modification in the extent and degree to which they may be professed or assented to.

The ranks of their nominal adherents are swelled by numbers who are far from embracing, or even, probably, apprehending the extreme principles of the leaders: and this is at once sanctioned by their policy, and consistent with the avowed nature of their tenets. The first appearance and ostensible character of this system, might

seem to involve little else than a more rigid maintenance of what is called strict orthodoxy, and a more exact observance of the ritual and injunctions of the church :—requisitions, the force of which is at once acknowledged by a great majority of the clergy. While, again, there are watchwords and calls to union, and to making a stand to oppose dissent, and an alarm raised against the advance of all that is evil, under the fearful names of “Socinianism,” and especially of “Rationalism.” These form rallying points to a vast number, who, to promote such great objects, readily join and acquiesce in a system, whose more recondite principles they do not pretend to have completely accepted, or even examined. All this, too, is powerfully aided at the present day, by a peculiar combination of external circumstances, and the state of political parties.

(3.) The whole subject, indeed, in all its bearings, is one which seems to me to call for a far more close scrutiny than it has generally received. Notwithstanding some excellent discussion on particular points, whether of doctrine or discipline, there is still wanting a more comprehensive review of the great principles on which the system of church authority is based ; and to which the mass of inquirers have the greater need to have their attention clearly directed, since nearly all the controversy which has been called forth, has referred to subordinate points.

To the superficial observer, the whole question may appear to be solely one of forms and rites ;—of the revival of obsolete practices ; of kneelings and bowings ; of liturgies and canons ; of fathers and councils ; of scholastic creeds, and metaphysical dogmas ;—which do not affect the vital truths of religion.

But, if more accurately examined, the subject will be found to involve topics of much deeper interest, and more substantial and general importance. The measure of popular discussion it has already received, has been of much use, if only in drawing attention to views which, whether true or false, equally demand investigation. And similar beneficial results, it is to be hoped, in an increased degree, may arise from the further examination of the subject, especially when treated on more comprehensive principles, and in the light in which I here propose to view it.

(4.) In popular language it has been the prevalent notion to accuse the supporters of this system of a direct leaning to *popery*: a charge which, nevertheless, in its proper sense, is easily seen to be unfounded. Nothing can be plainer than that in their writings, they studiously disclaim it. They draw a wide distinction between the ancient and primitive Catholic faith, and what they contend are the modern corruptions of it by the Church of Rome. And though they disavow the title of *Protestants*, yet they no less strenuously, in fact, *protest* against Romanism. We find them censuring its tenets in the strongest terms, condemning its followers as “holding the truth in unrighteousness,”* calling its councils “atrocious,” and wishing for the total overthrow of the system,† the maintenance of which is nothing less than “the cause of antichrist.”‡ Thus, it can only be from ignorance of the nature of the question, or disregard of such distinct disavowals, that any one can be led to attribute to these writers any attempt at a “revival of popery.” And when publicly

* FROUDE's *Remains*, i. 293.

† *Ibid.*, i. 307.

‡ *Tracts for the Times*, i. No. 15.

accused of such an attempt, it is not surprising that they have been able easily and triumphantly to vindicate themselves on the actual point of the accusation in its literal sense.*

(5.) But though standing entirely acquitted of a real *papistical* tendency, the upholders of this system are yet censured, as forming a party in the church, and disseminating peculiar tenets, which, though not literally popish, are, at least, strange to protestantism, utterly at variance with its spirit, and most unscriptural and pernicious in themselves. Even this charge, however, must in justice be considerably modified before we can allow it to be well founded. To a considerable extent, at least, they justify themselves with no small skill and learning. The authority of the fathers and councils, to which they appeal, was doubtless appealed to by most of the elder divines of the Church of England before them; nay, was the very plea of some of the most eminent of the reformers, and may even be traced in the homilies and articles. The claim which they raise to an apostolic succession, and the powers confirmed by it, is no other than has been asserted by a long and bright array of the fathers of the "Anglican" church before them, by Jones (of Nayland,) and Leslie, by Laud, and Cranmer. Their more elevated views of the sacraments are no others than those long ago professed by Bramhall and Ken, Hooker, and Bull. If they are popish in their devotional forms, they are so in company with some of the brightest ornaments of the Protestant church, with Nelson and Hicks, with Andrewes and Herbert. If they revive penance and fasting, it is in accordance with the rules of Leighton

* See Dr. FAUSSET's *Sermon*, and Mr. NEWMAN's letter in reply. Oxford, 1838.

and Hammond, of Ken and Kettlewell. Nay, even in prayers for the dead, they find their sanction in Usher and Jeremy Taylor.

(6.) We need not, however, attempt to pursue the more zealous votaries into the recesses of their temple. If we look at the influence which the system exercises on the multitude of its followers, we shall perceive that it is of precisely the *same kind* as that of the Romish church; and, though professedly at entire variance with popery in a literal acceptance, yet, in a wider sense, as referring to the ground and character both of doctrinal principles and devotional and ecclesiastical practices, there is that community of spirit and tendency which belongs to systems alike claiming an absolute authority over the conscience, grounded on an alleged divine commission. And, in common with the system of Romanism, it maintains a powerful ascendancy from appealing to the same, and those some of the most prevalent, weaknesses of human nature. To the many, impatient of inquiry and indolently led by the pretensions of authority, it holds forth the sufficiency of an implicit uninquiring submission to the decrees of the church; and to those who are anxiously seeking some means of satisfying or compounding with some slight demands of conscience, it proposes the comfortable assurance of the efficacy of its observances: propositions which the mass of nominal believers will be always well prepared to embrace. For others of a more serious cast, it possesses higher attractions of a similar kind. It enlists in its service a host of the most powerful feelings and associations, and turns into its own channel a current of zeal and fervour, which would otherwise probably takes its more natural course in the stream of enthusiasm.

(7.) But this system is able to accommodate itself to all tastes; and thus, with considerable effect, also lays claim to a peculiar alliance with *learning*; and puts forth exclusive pretensions to the acceptance of those who are deeply versed in real theological research, and the critical knowledge of Christian antiquity. It even calls philosophy to its aid, and professes to trace out its principles in all that widely ramified connexion, which must characterize deeply-rooted truth, with the theories of *morals*, and the ethical and metaphysical elements of all human motives and grounds of conviction.

Here, indeed, its advocates readily perceive their advantage; their stronghold is an university devoted to the study of the ancient philosophy, little known or esteemed elsewhere; and they number in their ranks some of the most eminent in this line of research. But their principal strength lies in the peculiar possession of the fountain heads of *ecclesiastical* erudition. Here they can assume the claim of almost exclusive knowledge, and feel warranted in looking down upon their opponents from a lofty vantage-ground.

It is allowed, without denying that there are many distinguished exceptions, that the great mass of Protestant divines have been deficient in this branch of theological learning. Nay, according to views very prevalent among them, it has been regarded as altogether of little moment; and with a considerable party, all this kind of erudition has even been held in absolute dislike and contempt. Here undoubtedly the advocates of the system we are speaking of have, not without reason, felt their superiority. Nor is this their only or chief point of strength.

(8.) Among Protestants of nearly all denominations, there have prevailed, and do prevail, certain views, not

merely on particular points of doctrine and practice, but referring to the general grounds of belief, and sources of religious truth, which, to say the least, appear, when critically examined, of a very dubious character: founded for the most part on narrow and ill-informed principles, and tending directly to very confused and unworthy views of Christianity. Opinions of the kind alluded to, may probably be traced to the ultra zeal which actuated a portion of the Reformers, and which descended to their successors, with even increased bitterness. It was said, "The Bible, and the Bible only" was the watchword of the Reformation; hence, the mere *letter* of the sacred volume became elevated in the eyes of the followers of the Reformation, as much into an object of worship, as the saints and apostles had been in those of the Romanists. Thus, from regarding Scripture as their sole appeal, they advanced to extravagant distortions of its use and authority. And the most prominent feature in several Protestant systems has been an overstrained and unwarranted view of the peculiar nature and character of divine inspiration; in accordance with which, the Bible came to be regarded, not merely as the sole authentic record of the Divine dispensations, but as possessing an inherent divine character and universal application, impressed upon every syllable and every letter. From this principle, various inferences have followed, which naturally terminated in an unhappy spirit of fanaticism and bigotry, not inferior in its way to anything exhibited in the worst days of papal darkness.

Now, in opposing these ultra-protestant errors and views of so unworthy a cast, a school of confessedly high attainments in philology and ecclesiastical learning, have been easily able to assume a position of superiocrity in the eyes of the more enlightened, and

to gain credit for successfully combating doctrines which, however cherished among the more ignorant portions of various religious communities, could not fail to disgust those of better information and more cultivated minds. Thus, they find a numerous party of supporters who will so far go along with them; and they are not slow to perceive the influence they can exert in the appeal to superior illumination, and more rational views of the grounds of religious belief, and of the general nature of Christian doctrine as purified from the repulsive tenets of a vulgar fanaticism.

In this respect, indeed, they concur closely, in some points, with those most widely opposed to them on others. They are far too well versed in the learned views of Christian theology to fall into the errors of illiterate expositors, and the blind adoption of the mere letter of the Bible, without distinction of times, persons, and dispensations, which has led to such melancholy perversions of Christianity among Protestants. Thus they are superior to that unhappy literalism which gives rise to the Calvinistic views in their various modifications; as well as those kindred doctrines which distinguish the puritanical school, as, *e. g.*, the confusion between the Jewish Decalogue and the moral law; and the notion that the obligation of the Sabbath was transferred to the Lord's day. On such points (especially the last) it would be, of course, impossible for any, versed in Christian antiquities, to fall into the vulgar errors which so widely prevail; and, accordingly, on these points, the traditionists (as far as they speak plainly) can claim the assent and approval of the enlightened inquirer.

(9.) These points are closely connected with the consideration of the peculiar *form* and *manner* in which

the Christian revelation is developed in the New Testament: that is, simply through the medium of a narrative and of occasional letters. Thus all its declarations of doctrine and practice appear but incidentally made, or merely alluded to, as things already known: at all events, no where stated *formally* and *systematically*. The total absence of any *precise code*, or *dogmatic formula* in the apostolic writings, is a fact not only admitted, but pointed out and insisted on, even by some of the most powerful opponents of this system.* In the matter of *fact*, then, both parties coincide; in marking its importance to a correct view of the case, they unite. This may be a point which is little considered by the generality, who have been accustomed to look to the mere text of Scripture as a literal rule. It may require some consideration to overcome the prepossession with which a different view is naturally at first regarded, and which possesses all that force arising from the very general adoption of such literal and systematized views of Scripture in religious education and public instruction.

Further, it is true that some difference of opinion may prevail as to the precise *extent* to which a person, supposed to be competently informed, but totally unprepossessed by creeds, if left to himself, would frame a doctrinal system from the bare text of the Bible. It would appear extremely difficult for those habituated to dogmatic forms and expositions, to place themselves fairly in the position of such an inquirer, so as to form any unbiassed view of this kind. They would almost unavoidably assume much too precise and systematic a scheme as the result of such supposed researches. This,

* See ARCHBISHOP WHATELY's Essay on this subject; and *Tracts for the Times*, No. 45. p. 5. NEWMAN's *Arians*, p. 158.

however, does not materially affect the main fact to which I have just referred : viz. that the ordinary dogmatic statements and schemes of the Christian revelation are not to be found in the actual words of the New Testament, nor even so implied, as to be deducible from the text in an obvious and unquestionable manner. So that if men were left to their own deductions from the text, and interpretations of it, they would hardly avoid great diversity in their views of the Christian system.

But while the *fact* is equally admitted, it is very differently *accounted* for and *applied* by opposite parties : by the Unitarians, and by the divines of the Church of England ; by the advocates of private judgment, and by the supporters of tradition. The last named, in fact, take up their strong position on this point, and make it their main argument for the necessity of a further guide.

(10.) This point will be more fully illustrated by the following considerations :—

Among those who most strenuously uphold the principle of “the Bible only,” and freedom of conscience, (it must be confessed), there is very commonly to be found an adherence to dogmas not a little inconsistent with those professions. There is clearly implied, if not avowed, a reference to *some power, vested somewhere*, to settle the *true* doctrine and interpretation of the Bible. Thus we have certain classes of dissenters distinguishing themselves as “orthodox.” Now this claim to “orthodoxy” must suppose *some* authority *besides* the Bible. It is not alone the church authority, handed down in an exclusive apostolic succession, which is inconsistent with the *sole* recognition of Scripture ; but any rule of doctrine *whatever*, other than that in which a number of individuals voluntarily agree. To uphold the Bible *alone*, is to uphold every man’s right to inter-

pret it : less than this, is to maintain the Bible with a *divided* authority ; the word of God, *conjointly* with some rule of man's devising.

The advocates of tradition are not backward to notice this inconsistency, and to press it upon the consideration of all who are desirous of keeping to what is called orthodoxy, and cannot but thus perceive the necessity of a paramount authority to lay down wherein it consists, and which must have a far higher origin than any mere human opinion.

The professed principle of "the Bible and the Bible only," when taken in conjunction with this disposition (not avowed, nor perhaps even perceived) to adopt what were *in reality other dogmatic standards*, has commonly driven Protestant divines to find in *Scripture*, authority for tenets which no unprepossessed mind could possibly detect *there* : and to stretch the logic of theology to the most extravagant length of inference, holding out, as decisive proofs of some doctrinal system, single texts, or expressions, or else what they term, "the general tenor of Scripture ;" where to all legitimate reasoning there could appear nothing but the remotest allusion, the most entirely imaginary parallel, or often no connexion or relation whatever.

Now as the traditional system does away with the necessity for such weak and flimsy inferences, so it is one of its most truly valuable characteristics, that its advocates are not backward to point out, and even insist upon, the distinction. They readily allow, and even contend for, the insufficiency of such pretended proofs of doctrinal points. They draw clearly the line between those propositions which are absolutely declared, or logically implied, in the actual text of Scripture, and those further systematic views, the proofs of which sound reason must pronounce quite illusory, *so far* as

this kind of testimony is relied upon: if they be *merely* sought for in the positive declarations of the *written* word, *there* they assuredly cannot be found. Hence their *conclusion*, the necessity for the *further authority* of tradition and the teaching of the Church.

Now this *conclusion* I shall examine in the sequel. My present purpose is merely to remark, that nothing can be more just and valuable than the considerations on which they build it. In this respect, the writings of the traditionists, and the free discussion of their views, cannot fail to be of essential service to sound theology. To draw attention to this very important, but lamentably neglected distinction, is, of all objects, one of the most desirable in the existing state of theological views.

(11.) The distinction here dwelt upon is applied by these writers themselves to several points of doctrine. I will here advert very briefly to one; viz., that which concerns the constitution and authority of the Christian church itself. There have been many divines who fancied they could read in the actual records of the New Testament, (especially when mixed up in some ill-explained manner with the Old,) a complete scheme of church government and apostolic authority, as an integral and essential part of Christianity; a scheme establishing a perpetual exclusive divine commission to administer the sacraments, to perpetuate the succession, and to condemn heretics: though different parties have contended for such an institution under different forms.

Now the traditionists readily allow (what must appear to the strict inquirer,) that all such appeal to *written* evidence *alone* is utterly insufficient to establish the point. No such institution, complete and distinct, is to be found in the New Testament, positively delivered,

or strictly deducible ; no code of its constitution laid down like the Levitical in the Old. *Tradition*, however, supplies the deficiency : and showing us what was the practice and doctrine of the apostolic *fathers*, furnishes the key to the right understanding of the few scattered hints given by the apostles themselves, and enables us to put the detached fragments together into a regular building ; which we *could not do without its aid*. The question then is, *what is the authority* of this tradition of these fathers of the early church ? We may here just remark by the way, that some supporters of tradition and church authority (apparently not fully possessed with its principles,) have upheld it, not as *independent*, but only as having its claims distinctly proved from Scripture ; for which they allege certain passages : but if the sense be disputed, then they are driven to allege further, that what they mean is, those passages when understood agreeably to their true and orthodox interpretation ; but this is established by the authority of tradition and the sentence of the church. Yet this authority again in its turn is derived from those passages, so understood ! The perpetual circle in which we thus get involved is too palpable to need further remark. We must advance upon an *independent* ground of tradition to follow out the consistent views of church authority. To proceed then :

(12.) With respect to the teaching of the church. The advocates of tradition dwell upon the consideration that the Bible was never meant for the purpose of rudimentary instruction ; that more especially the books of the New Testament were obviously not written with the object of conveying the first elements to converts ; and that in fact no one ever, for the first time, learns the truths of Christianity without other instruction, by

the mere perusal of the Scriptures alone. Hence they maintain that the teaching of the church is after all the only way by which religious instruction is or can be in the first instance communicated, and that such teaching can only address itself to the disciple in the voice of authority.

Now even *thus far* many of the opponents of this system will go along with its advocates. It is indeed manifest that, from the mere necessity of the case, such must be the actual mode and course of religious instruction in the great majority of cases. The many must unavoidably trust principally to the teaching of others, and almost implicitly follow their authority. And no person of common sense will deny, that it is even a most rational proceeding to follow and adopt the instructions of those who we are convinced are wiser and better informed than ourselves. The maxim "*oportet discentem credere,*" is one which commands the assent of every reasonable man.

But let it be carefully observed, that in reference to our present subject, there is a most material distinction involved. The question is not *whether* such teaching should be followed, but on *what grounds*; not whether it be useful, but to *what extent* it is to be carried. Every learner must take much on trust; but to do so beyond a certain point, is to put an end to all real learning. The real question at issue is, not whether *some* elementary teaching laid down by a voice of authority be not right, and even indispensable, but what is the *origin, nature, and extent of that authority*? To this main question, however concealed and disguised by irrelevant matter and discussions of secondary importance, all the other topics which have been agitated are entirely subordinate. Of these topics many, from their nature, have assumed an undue prominence; or in some instances, perhaps,

they have been purposely put forward to withdraw the attention of the opponent from the real and essential points, which were studiously kept in the back-ground.

But if the inquirer resolutely cast aside the false trappings, which do but encumber and conceal the real question, he will find it involve considerations of the deepest importance. The discussion of the nature and evidence of *traditional authority will be found intimately connected with the very foundations of faith and the essential grounds of all religion*. It is under such a sense of the importance of the subject, that I conceive it necessary to follow it up in further detail.

(13.) Endeavouring, then, to collect the fairest view of this system from the writings of its avowed supporters, we find that it recognises formularies of faith, rites, ceremonies, interpretations of doctrine, rules of practice, together with peculiar views of the efficacy of certain ordinances connected with powers exclusively vested in an episcopally-ordained priesthood, all founded and supported on an authority inherent in the Church, which is supplementary to that of the Scriptures, and is appealed to, conjointly with the New Testament. It is held to have been conveyed through a perpetual unbroken tradition. On this ground a scheme and system of faith and practice is laid down, which, it is admitted, is not to be found expressly stated in the writings of the New Testament; where, in fact, its different points are never more than indirectly referred to. The written record is merely appealed to as furnishing certain evidence in corroboration and support of the dogmas of the Church, which have an independent origin and authority of their own.

This tradition, it is contended, has been conveyed down in an uncorrupt stream; not, indeed, always flow-

ing with an equally wide, strong, or conspicuous current, yet never interrupted or lost. It is traced upward, from the writings of the Oxford school of the present day, (by whom it has but been more pointedly brought into notice,) to those of a few comparatively obscure theologians of the past century: from these, through the divines of the nonjuring party, up to Laud and his coadjutors: and so to a certain portion of the reformers, whose pre-eminent merit, among their very irregular and often heretical brethren, was the strict preservation of these ancient principles, amid the rage for novelty, and the unjustifiable and indiscriminate attacks which, in those untoward times, were so ruthlessly made on all the venerable institutions of the Church. Through this channel (however little regarded in the turmoil,) was preserved the vital current of tradition; which had passed less perverted and contaminated than is commonly supposed through the schoolmen, and the councils, downwards from those purer ages in which the same great invariable truths had been consigned in the writings of the Fathers: while the general consent of the orthodox, in all parts of the world, was the evidence of a common primeval origin; and the precious and authentic records of the earliest age,—the remains of the Apostolic fathers,—and the practices of their times, directly connected the whole system with the teaching of the Apostles themselves, who had confessedly left in writing but a small portion of the instructions orally delivered to their converts and successors.

(14.) The remains which have come down to us of the Fathers are not, indeed, set up as furnishing the entire system of primitive doctrine, but only as forming a part of the accumulation of the floating body of tradition, portions of which have, in all ages, been from time

to time arrested from their fugitive condition, and retained in writing. In thus recording and transmitting the traditions delivered to them, it was not, perhaps, necessary that these writers should formally state or maintain the authority attached to them. It has, however, been a matter of question, discussed with much learning, whether they do actually recognise that authority.* Passages have been cited, in which such appeal is directly made; but these refer to instances in which it appears that the opponents, with whom those fathers were contending, also appealed to other traditions of their own. The question between them thus became rather one of the relative value of the two opposing traditions; or of the right of these "heretics," (so they seem to have represented it,) to possess any tradition at all.

Such controversies may at least teach us something of the absolute value of tradition, even in those times.

But the more special point of view, in which we are now considering the subject, does not require the particular examination of these testimonies; we are rather concerned with what must be the general *character* of tradition, and the *authority* which, if properly authenticated, it must necessarily claim.

(15.) In pursuing our inquiry into the evidence for the purity and authority of the doctrines thus handed down, we ought not to pass over one principle which has been appealed to for fixing it, and has obtained considerable celebrity, as, at least in appearance, offering a general rule of very simple and universal application,—the reference to the "general consent" of the Church as the sole and sufficient test of true doctrine;—most comprehensively expressed in the maxim, "*quod semper,*

* See Dr. SHUTTLEWORTH *On Tradition*, p. 1—9.

ubique et ab omnibus," of Vincentius Lirinensis; a rule equally decisive as to its *meaning* and as to its *evidence*, when carefully considered.

If we look to the interpretation of it, it amounts in fact to this:—That is the orthodox doctrine which is held by *all the orthodox*, at all times, and in all places.

And its *authority* is equally clear; for supposing the meaning freed from all ambiguity, and we inquire what makes it binding: it is manifest we have either the *ipse dixit* of Vincentius, or the authority of general consent, obviously proved by general consent.

These points involve difficulties which may incline us rather to return to the general question. And, after all, it will be manifest that no such evidence as mere *consent*, even if *universal*, can satisfy the real demands of church authority, which, to be worth anything, must look to far higher credentials.

(16.) Now in looking at the nature and evidence of this tradition, it will be expedient to dwell briefly on one point: not indeed that it is contested or denied by the traditionists, but that it is necessary for a clear view of the matter, that it should be kept entirely free from the ambiguity in which the writers of this school too often envelop their meaning.

The doctrine of the church, the traditions thus delivered, do, in fact, convey some views over and above those actually disclosed in the writings of the New Testament alone. This indeed is almost too evident to need formally stating. But it is desirable to keep steadily in view, how absolutely this is, and must be the case, whether the *addition* be made in one form or another: whether it consist in the actual propounding of some specific doctrine in express terms; or merely in an explanation or sense put upon the terms of some passage of Scripture:

or in a scheme, arrangement, or formulary, by which the scattered declarations of the sacred writers are reduced into system and connected together; or in the positive injunction of a rite or institution, only alluded to, and perhaps not that, in the New Testament. *In any way there is something added.* By some of this School,* Tradition and the Church are expressly represented as standing in the same position with respect to the Bible, as the Newtonian system does with respect to the mere phenomena of astronomy: which at first sight even appear at variance with it. According to them, the office of the church is not only to preserve the true doctrine, but to drive away the false: the church is to condemn heresy:† that is, to be the judge of the truth: and the *judge* is the *depository* of the truth. They claim for the church an authority to enforce its decrees on the acceptance of men, and to demand their submission.‡

(17.) The *facts* being thus clear and undisputed, let us proceed a step further, and remark on the *nature* and *bearing* of them. Now to render this more distinct, let us put for a moment the supposition that the founders of Christianity were *only* pre-eminently wise and good men, the preachers of a pure and rational system of religion and morals: *then* the whole scheme of tradition is perfectly intelligible and unexceptionable. In this case they might have left but imperfect records of their doctrines,—they might have adopted a method of oral instruction, and have organized a traditionary system, which their successors might have carried on to higher degrees; and *possessing an equal authority* with

* See FROUDE'S *Remains*, vol. i. p. 142.

† NEWMAN'S *Arians*, p. 253.

‡ *Letter to Fausset*, p. 98.

their first teachers, might have more fully developed, and even improved upon, the original principles : while the concurrent judgment of those most deeply versed in the system would afford a satisfactory authority as to its true meaning at all times.

If, however, a different view be taken ; if, in accordance, at least, with all commonly received notions of Christianity, it be allowed that its founders were invested with a peculiar superhuman authority ;—if Divine Revelation be considered to stand apart from all mere human systems as a thing *sui generis* ;—then, such an amalgamation of the original disclosures with the body of subsequent traditional teaching, will involve insuperable difficulties and contradictions,—*unless the same divine authority belong to both.*

Now the advocates of tradition, it is to be presumed, could never allow such a supposition as that above put ;—they are, at least, *professed* believers in the Divine character of Christianity : and thus, regarding it from its outset as one continued and indivisible institution, the same divine authority must attach to all its subsequent stages, in which further and more systematic views, that is, *additional truths*, were developed by those who succeeded to the chair of authoritative instruction.

(18.) If the disclosure of Christian truth began by inspiration, nothing afterwards can add to it but an authority equivalent to inspiration. No power can decide *with authority* in any case what is the *sense* of Revelation, but the same which originally disclosed it.

Mere *human* authority, however good, is obviously insufficient for this purpose. The combined suffrages of all the wisest and best *men* can never amount to a *divine sentence* obligatory on others. Universal consent is but *human* opinion still ; which can therefore only

bind those who agree in it. *Unauthoritative* tradition (however applicable in other ways), can never create points of faith, or lay down the terms of salvation: to do so, it must become *authoritative*. If then the New Testament be admitted to contain the divine revelation of Christianity, and if the additional interpretation of tradition and judgment of the church be equally necessary to the full exposition and maintenance of the Gospel, then *these traditional and authoritative additions must also be regarded as conveying portions of divine revelation as well as the written record: they must in fact be a part of the Gospel: they must be as much the word of God as the New Testament is*. Now even this conclusion is distinctly allowed by some of the writers of this school at the present day.

They expressly speak of "*Revelation wherever found, —in Scripture, or antiquity.*"* They maintain "the divinity of traditionary religion;"† to impugn it, is "blasphemy."‡ They place even the modern formularies of the church upon the same level as Scriptures. "The authority of the church is embodied in its articles of faith . . . they are as much an integral part of the Christian dispensation as the Bible itself."§ Nay, if we can get over an apparent contradiction, it would seem that the articles are of higher authority than the Bible: for, we have "two great foundations of religion, —the Bible and the Articles; for the Bible is included in the Articles."||

It must here be remarked that I have used the term, "Divine Revelation," in the popular sense in which it is commonly employed, perhaps involving a considerable

* *British Critic*, No. 45, p. 224.

† NEWMAN'S *Arians*, p. 87.

‡ FROUDE'S *Remains*, i. 438.

§ SEWELL, on *Subscription*, p. 34.

|| SEWELL, p. 37.

complexity of ideas, if closely analyzed, but still sufficiently free from ambiguity to convey an idea of some distinct depository of Christian truth. Now with regard to the actual volume of Scripture, it will, on all sides, be allowed, that considerable difference of opinion does, and may fairly, exist, as to the precise nature of that inspired character which is generally ascribed to it by Protestants. The extreme views held by one party, of a literal inspiration in every syllable, have certainly been such as seemed, to the more calm and reasoning inquirers, chargeable with fanatical extravagance; and doubtless, so far the disciples of the school of tradition, in avoiding these extreme opinions, appear to adopt those which accord with the results of more learned and enlightened inquiry; perhaps even, to some, they may seem to advance not a little towards an *opposite extreme*, in adopting so very *wide* a notion of inspiration as would be necessary in order to include antiquity as well as Scripture: nay, not merely antiquity, but the "Articles of the Church of England," "the lives and deaths of the great framers of which, attested a supernatural assistance."*

Thus, then, according to this system, it follows that the tradition, the commentary, the synopsis, the general scheme of Christian doctrine, handed down through the teaching of the primitive church,—the forms, the observances, the sacerdotal authority, thus transmitted, are all parts of the revelation of Christianity, essential to the right recognition of the real spirit and genius of the Apostolic institution, as much so as the text of the New Testament. Now, in looking to the *authority* of this tradition, (without entering into the details of its uncorrupt transmission in later times,) let us go at once

* SEWELL, on *Subscription*, p. 33.

to the fountain head, to the earliest, and, therefore, it is presumed, to the purest stage of traditional evidence; viz.—the Church and the writings of the Fathers in the first few centuries. In the writings of St. Justin and St. Irenæus, and in the institutions of their times, we are to learn the views of Christian doctrine, and the observances of Christian discipline, which they received from their predecessors: we are led back to St. Ignatius, and St. Polycarp, to St. Clement, and St. Hermas, the contemporaries and fellow-labourers of the apostles.

(19.) The writings, then, of the early Fathers embody and record, at least, some portion of the instructions they had received from the apostles, over and above what the apostles themselves have bequeathed in their writings. If the works of the fathers are authentic and genuine, these recorded doctrines are neither more nor less than fragments of the New Testament: the depository of them is just as much the word of God as any part of the apostolic writings. Where is the difference between a passage in St. Irenæus, recording the doctrine delivered by St. John, and a passage in the Acts, recording a discourse of St. Peter?

If what is recorded be no more than mere verbatim repetitions of what we find in the New Testament, then, indeed, they are testimonies to the genuineness of the New Testament, but nothing more. This, however, (as we have seen,) is a very small part of what tradition pretends to. It manifests claims of higher character than this. The whole system implies the *addition of an authorized comment* to the apostles' writings. The very office of the church, according to this view, is to preserve a body of exposition, and form of doctrine and discipline over and above the bare text. The fathers lay down such comments and such doctrines with an

authority which they derived from the apostles, but in terms *beyond* merely those employed by the apostles in their writings.

According to this view, then, the church and the fathers were simply as much the depositaries of one portion of Christian doctrine, as the apostles and evangelists were of another. The church was commissioned to lay down the outline and principles of a system, of which the New Testament exhibits the scattered details. The authority of both then being exactly alike, the difference, if any, being only in the particular department assigned to each, it is a necessary consequence that the EVIDENCE *requisite to establish that authority must be* PRECISELY THE SAME *for each.*

If revealed truth require the evidences usually assigned to it, then those evidences must be found *equally* attesting *every vehicle* of revelation. *Scripture contains revealed truth; and the dogmas of the church are an additional body of revealed truth; and all revealed truth must equally require, or not require,* THE SAME EVIDENCE. To suppose such attestation given in one instance, and withheld in another, would be to vitiate the whole body of evidence; since we should then never know where to recognise it, and must altogether cease to trust to it. Now the *kind* of evidence, at least, most generally looked to, is that derived from *miracles*; which, in this view, (as developed by the most approved writers,) are regarded solely as the *credentials* of a *divine commission.*

(20.) Now it is well known to be one of the most striking and important portions of the tradition conveyed in the writings of the fathers, that it bears distinct and unequivocal testimony to the *prevalence of miraculous powers in the church, not only in the earliest age, but even to a much later period.* To call in question these recorded

testimonies of the Christian writers, would be to impugn their authority altogether. It is impossible to refuse them credit in attesting the occurrence of matters of fact, while their authority is accepted in delivering doctrines, or in transmitting the practices and institutions of the church. The depositaries of apostolic truth surely cannot for a moment be disregarded in their statements of miraculous events. Now, we have already pointed out the *essentially divine character of the authoritative teaching of the church*. It therefore follows, according to the plain view of Christian evidence, that we must regard it *in connexion with the miraculous powers* vouchsafed to the church. They were manifestly the evidences of that *inspiration*, which, (on the system of authority as above shown,) we are compelled to ascribe to the early teachers. Supernatural gifts were clearly evidential of superhuman powers vested in the successors of the apostles; they were certificates of that divine deposit intrusted to them over and above the text of the New Testament; and which, after all refinements and distinctions, could be nothing else than divine revelation.

These considerations bring us directly to the connexion of these ages with that of the apostles themselves. The system of tradition involves the whole question of Christian evidence. The cases are one and the same. The Christian missionaries in the time of St. Irenæus, and later, ejected evil spirits, healed the sick, and raised the dead;* and they taught by divine commission the unwritten word: that is, they worked miracles, and taught revealed truth, of which they were the depositaries. St. Peter and St. Paul did no more. The case of the early fathers is thus identified with that of the

* For example see IRENÆUS, [A. D. 190] *Adv. Hæres*, proëm 3. ii. 22, 56. v. 6. Also ORIGEN, [A. D. 220] *Cont. Cels*, iii.

apostles. On these principles, wherein do they differ? or how can we say that the miraculous commission of the apostles ever ended, and that of an unaided and un-gifted church began?

(21.) According to the system we are considering, the constitution of the church is one and indivisible; the chain of tradition unbroken and indissoluble through succeeding ages. Its different successive portions are undistinguishable in authority, truth, and evidence. No period can be assigned, at which any essential change in the nature of the case took place. The divine commission vested in the successors of the apostles was, in like manner, transmitted to those who were ordained to succeed them: the same gifts and powers were alike continued as the indispensable credentials of their authority to decree and distinguish absolutely *what was Christian truth*, and *what was heresy*. This authority they certainly were not slow to claim and to exercise. Nor did the pretensions to its possession decrease as ages elapsed. It obviously matters not that in later times the precise extent and form of authority claimed, the precise shape in which it was pretended to be conferred, might have been greatly modified, or peculiar claims set up as to the exact parties who might be its chief depositary. The broad fact that such power was in any way claimed and exercised, is sufficient for our purpose. What were its evidences? Will it be said that it *required less evidence* at a greater distance of time? Will it be contended that equal or even stronger test of its purity was not necessary at a greater distance from the source? Rather the reverse, we might imagine, should be the case. But, as to the fact, were not the same external evidences continued? Were not miraculous powers still pretended to by the church through a succession of

ages? Was the claim ever dropped? Was the chain of miracles ever interrupted? Is it not upheld by theological writers, and ecclesiastical historians, who, if they did belong to a portion of the church, might have become corrupt in some particulars, yet could not have their testimony or veracity impugned merely from this circumstance?

In this respect, then, the latest and darkest ages of superstition and corruption are inseparably united in one chain of evidence with the earliest and purest times. And these, again, are as necessarily connected with the present. And the very same considerations oblige us to ask, how is it that there are now no miracles to authenticate the divine decrees of the church? Or, are we to believe that such miracles or "half-miracles" are occasionally wrought, and that dormant powers are revived in the church?*

Thus the manifest consequence of the system of tradition and church authority is *to obliterate the boundary line of distinctive evidence between the New Testament and the fathers and councils; between the apostles and their successors to the present day. In this view both are placed on the same footing; both must be equally inspired and divine; or, (we have the alternative,) both equally uninspired and human.*

(22.) It is on all hands confessed that the subject of the miracles of the early church is not free from difficulties; but, upon the system of church authority, they become serious. The state of things in the Christian world, even to the present times, is thus identified with that which, in other ages, was deemed miraculous. And this manifestly tends to impugn all those distinct notions

* e. g. See FROUDE'S *Remains*, vol. i. p. 321

of special divine interposition, which have been insisted on by those who have attempted a logical discussion of the evidence of miracles. According to the views so laid down by the most eminent writers, the precise force of that evidence is, to supply a definite test of that which *is divine revelation*, and that which *is not*. Hence, any system which breaks down the boundary line, which disguises it, renders it hazy or ill-defined, as effectually defeats and nullifies the evidence as if it were rejected and denied altogether.

We have, then, to inquire further, how can the traditional doctrine be relieved from this serious objection? And we may consider the alternatives which present themselves.

1st, It is alleged that the miracles of the primitive church were not *evidential*, but wrought for some other objects?—for the support of the church under difficulties? or, appealed to as a triumph over the magical pretensions of the heathen from their *superior* wonder and power?* And that, in fact, in an age where everything was ascribed to the supernatural, no distinction would be perceived, no test afforded?

If so, how can we argue upon the miracles of the New Testament as *being evidential*? How are we to draw the distinction? If *several* parties present the *same credentials*, how are we to distinguish any *as the ambassador*?

Or, 2dly, Are we (along with some eminent writers) to call in question the *credit* of the miracles of the later ages, and contend that the belief in demoniacal possessions and the power of exorcism, or the general proneness to the supernatural, was only what was common to the spirit of the times, to which the Christian teachers were either not superior, or conformed themselves? Or

* See NEANDER'S *Eccl. Hist. Transl.* p. 67, and PALEY'S *Evid.* vol. ii. p. 339.

that legendary fictions and pious frauds were the admitted and justified vehicles of orthodox instruction? If so, *upon the traditional principle*, how are we to avoid extending the same observations to *the earlier ages*? If tradition and authoritative teaching are combined *uninterruptedly* into one body with the records of the apostles, how shall credit be given to one part, which is withheld from another, of *the same connected system* of authoritative truth?

How and where shall we break up the indivisibility of the *one body* and *scheme* of Christian instruction and apostolic authority? and of the evidences which authenticate it? It is not the rejection of the miracles of later ages, the partial and one-sided criticisms of Middleton, which will avail; the traditionist must take higher ground, and rather seek alliance with Gibbon and Hume.

The same principle must apply to the truth of miracles in the church in all ages alike, *if* the teaching of all ages be alike authoritative and divine. Were then the successive bishops and teachers of the church divinely attested messengers? the accredited depositaries of an infallible revelation, the oracles of Christian truth? or are the miracles of the apostles and their Lord to be rejected or explained away? are we to adopt *faith* in the *fathers* or *rationalism* towards the *New Testament*? One of the two courses we must follow, if this system be true. The advocates of authoritative tradition and an inspired church must equally uphold or reject its external credentials in all times.

3dly, Another alternative remains. We have thus far *assumed* the correctness of the view of the external evidence of Christianity, as laid down by the most approved writers: as Paley and others. Will the advocates of tradition contend that these views are *altogether*

faulty in principle? will they reject as fallacious and presumptuous, the idea of demanding miracles as the *indispensable** credentials of inspiration? Shall we be told that these statements of evidence are merely of a nature addressed to popular apprehension; and that, to insist on them as the necessary proofs of our faith, only shows that we have not fathomed the depths of the subject? Or, allowing the existence of those difficulties in establishing their credibility, which have appeared so insurmountable to sceptics, will it be considered better to avoid discussing them, and thus to discard such arguments as altogether of no force and no value, and in fact concede every thing to the unbeliever?

(23.) When we come to the actual declarations of the traditionists, it is difficult to make out their views on matters of evidence, or in the ambiguity of their language to discover which of the above alternatives they prefer. But their sentiments, when they do break through what seems a conscious shyness of discussion, appear, to say the least, open to much doubt and suspicion. Such ideas (for instance) as are implied in the following passage, surely can but tend directly to confound all distinct notions of miraculous evidence.

“Whoso will not recognise the finger of God in his providential cures, will not see it in his miraculous: When men had explained away, as the *mere* effects of imagination, cures, in modern times out of the wonted order of God’s Providence, which, though no confirmation of a religious system, seem to have been personal rewards to strong personal faith, they were ready to apply the same principle to many of the miracles of the Gospel; when they had ceased to see in

* See PALEY’S *Evidences*, vol. i. p. 3.

lunatics the power permitted to evil spirits, they were prepared, and did, as soon as it was suggested, deny it in the demoniacs of the New Testament.”* Again, we may perhaps discover their sense of the value of the miraculous evidence of the New Testament, when they ascribe exactly *as much* certainty to similar claims *unsupported* by such evidence: *e. g.* “We must be as *sure*,” they say, “that the bishop is Christ’s appointed representative, as if we actually saw him work miracles as St. Peter and St. Paul did.”†

At all events, it is certain that the very discussion of the entire question of Christian evidence is greatly *disliked* and *avoided* by the theologians of this school; they are fond of alleging the seeming *irreverence* in its whole character and spirit. Involving as it does, as a first hypothesis, the putting the inquirer, for the moment, into the position of a sceptic, the very process of such argument is objected to as unbecoming, and even perilous. It is conceived to imply a coldness, and a want of “loyalty” to the spritual authority of the Gospel, so much as to stop to entertain any question respecting it, or discussion of its truth; the very attitude of challenging evidence is one which bears a bold and hostile appearance, which can never be assumed by the humble and submissive votary of the church.

They affect to turn away in a fastidious disgust from the subject of evidence, or perhaps really shrink from it in a correct perception of its inconsistency with their views. They regard faith as degraded by the very mention of proof: “As if,” they indignantly exclaim, “evidence to the word of God were a thing to be tolerated by a Christian, except as an additional *condemna-*

* Dr. PUSEY’S *Sermon*, on 5th Nov., 1837, p. 3.

† *Tracts for the Times*, No. 10, p. 4.

tion for those who reject it, or as a sort of *exercise* and *indulgence* for a Christian *understanding*.”*

What are such ideas but the exact counterpart of those professed in a very opposite school?—in which it is a constant topic to urge that the ardent spirit of faith, offended by cold discussion, dispenses with the dry details of evidence; that our Lord’s miracles were only adaptations to the prevailing superstitions of those to whom they were presented, and who thus stood peculiarly *condemned* in rejecting them; and that, in fact, he himself put them in this light, and assigned them but a very secondary importance. Or again, what is it but the favorite speculation of a party, the most denounced by the orthodox, to give a wide scope to the *indulgence* of a contemplative spirit, in tracing out the “mythic” interpretation of miracles, (the narratives of which they contend were only designed for religious parables;) and to find extensive *exercise* for an enlightened *understanding*, in applying the resources of learning and science to examine the philological ambiguities of the text, or to explain the apparent miracles as only extraordinary natural occurrences, cases of suspended animation, or of animal magnetism? Or, while they are *exoterically* condemned, are those some of the *esoteric* doctrines into which only the privileged adepts in the school of tradition are admitted?

Thus, whichever alternative be adopted, whichever view of the subject be preferred, it cannot but equally appear, that all distinctive evidence is virtually lost, confounded, or rejected. And thus the traditionists in practice take the consistent course. They dismiss all difficulties and silence all objections at once, by prohibiting the use of reason on the subject. The disciple

* *British Critic*, No. 48, p. 304.

is invited to take refuge from all perplexities in an uninquiring acquiescence in oracular decrees; and is consoled with the assurance that he will ultimately feel complete satisfaction in the patient assiduous practice of dutiful submission to the authority of the church. Thus he is infallibly secured from harassing doubts and unprofitable speculations, by discarding all positive views of evidence and truth.

(24.) And the *resulting influence* of this system is of a corresponding character; for it is even an avowed part and effect of it to leave its votaries in perpetual *uncertainty*, LEST this or that tenet or practice *may NOT be* a part of the apostolic institution, though not precisely recorded.* And *that we cannot be sure it is NOT so*, is regarded as a substantial ground of faith; and such a spirit is cherished as an indication of that reverential frame of mind which peculiarly harmonizes with the humility of a true disciple of the church. It envelopes in haziness the spiritual horizon, so that the votary is unable to distinguish the boundary between earth and heaven. He cannot tell how much is divine, how much human, in the religion he professes. A frame of mind which seems to me, in one sense, the very essence of superstition; in another, betrays, to say the least, a singular accordance with rationalism or scepticism. The effect of reducing that which is divine to the level of that which is human, is equally produced by exalting the human into divine. If the disciple find metaphors elevated into mysteries, he may interpret it as reducing mysteries into metaphors. When all notion of distinctive evidence is lost, and all positive characteristics dis-

* For example, see FROUDE'S *Remains*, p. 336; NEWMAN'S *Letter to Fausset*, vol. i. p. 43.

carded, then the same vague and mystified language will as well apply to the one view of the subject as the other. The "reverent phraseology" of theological terms and scriptural epithets may as properly be used to clothe the expression of a mere philosophical and moral system or theory of religious impressions, divested of the peculiar evidence of divine interposition, as to describe the doctrines of an authoritative church which does not appeal to evidential conviction.

(25.) But the total surrender of the judgment is even defended as a *philosophical* ground of assent. *Authority* is represented as really at the basis of all systems of instruction, even in science.* If Christianity were a system of mere human doctrines, to be moulded and represented at the discretion of the teachers, then such a principle might apply as belonging to it in common with any moral system. And to these the Gospel will be exactly assimilated, when we go along with the traditionists in keeping out of sight, and in fact discarding all tangible distinctive evidence. Such a system may, no doubt, possess eminent practical recommendations; and to understand its full efficacy, we are sent to the schools of ancient philosophy to learn the advantages of an institution under which the disciple, after a long course of assiduous preparation, (during which he is not allowed to exercise his own judgment,) is at length sufficiently imbued with the practical feeling of entire submission, and a reverential habit of mind, to be trusted to view the interior secrets of the doctrine. Thus pre-possessed, he will be best qualified for maintaining a steady unquestioning adherence to it. He will feel no difficulties, and be startled by no objections; he will see

* See *British Critic*, No. 47, article on Plato, &c.

that it is wisest not to meddle with them, and hazardous to enter upon discussion.

And applying these philosophical principles to theology, he learns that "an intellectual, a reasonable religion, is a thing which nullifies itself."* Orthodoxy, if exposed to the rude shock of argument and the tests of evidence, would fall. Rational investigation leads to socinianism and deism. To silence inquiry is the proper way to Christian belief. Faith is a duty; the more meritorious in proportion to the objections felt and silenced.

Under the illumination of this system, the ordinary views of the evidences of revelation may be regarded as among the errors of "popular Protestantism." The traditionist may avoid giving offence to established prejudices, by translating the rationalistic views of miracles and inspiration into "reverent language;" and thus escape from the dry, repulsive, and *unsatisfactory* examination of the proofs of revelation. Or, dwelling upon some real or supposed resemblances and coincidences of the theories of heathen philosophy, the learned advocates of this system may represent them as anticipations of the Gospel, and thus lead captive the minds of their classical disciples with the alluring visions of platonism, and so prepare them for a similar mystification of Christianity; which may thus come, not unnaturally, to be placed on the same level.

The disciple of this system may, in happy security, follow antiquity as the surest guide to revelation, and recognise the "divinity of tradition," even to the age of the deluge.† He may detect revelation scattered in paganism, and believe "Christianity as old as the crea-

* See *British Critic*, No. 48, p. 348.

† See *British Critic*, No. 48; notice of Mr. Harcourt on the Deluge.

tion," as it doubtless is, if it be a mere undefined feeling of devotional awe and religious veneration. He may, by some new powers of physical investigation, trace "the peculiarities of Christianity, written legibly in the hieroglyphics of the physical world;"* or, by some refined species of philosophy, recognise animal magnetism as "representing a metaphysical theory and intellectual facts precisely the counterpart of his own religious belief;"† which, for *such* a religious belief may doubtless be true. He may, in short, read Christianity anywhere *except* in the New Testament.

(26.) Yet even under this system, when the votary is called upon to submit his judgment to authority, is he not to satisfy himself in the first instance on what the claims of that authority rest? If he is exhorted to follow "the *old paths*," is he not to inquire into their *antiquity*? If the Catholic traditions are to be kept, but not the Romish, is he not to judge which are Catholic and which Romish? In short, *at some stage* is there not to be an appeal to conviction? Though it be forbidden to discuss the tenets inculcated, yet surely the disciple must, in the first instance, be satisfied of the commission of the teacher to inculcate them. Though private judgment is prohibited as to *doctrines*, is its use forbidden as to the *evidences* on which the Church grounds its claim? Or does the Church go the length of asserting absolute supremacy and infallibility, and thus urge a *compulsory* submission, without even a question as to its authority, and lift the sword of persecution as its sole evidence?‡ This, indeed, would be but con-

* NEWMAN'S *Arians*, p. 80, 89. *British Critic*, No. 48. p. 304.

† *Ibid.*, p. 313.

‡ This seems to be the case. See NEWMAN'S *Arians*, p. 253.

sistency, if its claim be followed out to its legitimate extent. Then, in fact, it would do no more than the Church of Rome has done; and with perfect reason. A church really divine and infallible cannot condescend to any appeal to human conviction. To doubt its authority is *a sin*; to call it in question is *blasphemy*. Such are the fair pretensions of the Romish church: and such were the real demands of a *truly infallible church*, having inherent divine power, viz., the Jewish, having the divine oracle sensibly present, and miraculous powers, it *commanded* submission:* the heretic was to be *cut off*: the impugner stoned, and its authority was attested by our Lord:† “hear‡ the church,” and let the rebel against it be as an heathen and publican.

Thus, from the very nature of the case, it follows that the alternative *can* only be between rational evidence and absolute infallibility. If a man may judge for himself on *one point*, what *can* hinder him from judging on *another? or all others? What power shall draw the line, without being itself amenable to the same judgment?* Private opinion *must* be allowed on *all* points, or prohibited on *all* points; and if prohibited, it must be by *force*, not by reason: for that would be an appeal to reason. There *can* be no middle course between the *unlimited* freedom of conviction and the dungeon or the stake.

The exercise of private judgment has been often asserted and contended for as a matter of *right*: but according to the view here taken, it rather must be viewed as a matter of *necessity*;—as the *only alternative*, if we once recede from the absolute power of an infallible, that is, divinely-inspired church.

* Deut. xvii. 6; Numb. xxxv. 30.

† Matt. xxiii. 2.

‡ Matt. viii. 17.

The upholders of tradition can claim nothing less than infallibility; for, without this, their pretensions and practice towards others would be monstrous, and their claims presumptuous, and even impious.

(27.) Now, notwithstanding the magnitude of the evils already exposed as involved in the very principles of the system, yet it is this last consequence of authoritative tradition,—the maintenance of the principle* and spirit of *persecution* (inseparable from it), which, to my apprehension, constitutes the most objectionable and repulsive characteristic of this school, the worst and most noxious element of their system.

When I look even at the direct tendency of their doctrine (before pointed out) to reduce all definite belief into a mystified view of “the whole Bible as one great parable,”† to disparage the evidence of miracles, and *allow* entire scepticism under the disguise of formal orthodoxy, though feeling bound to use my endeavours to expose what appear to me such dangerous errors, in the way of fair argument, still I should be the last to deny the entire *right* of the parties to adopt these opinions. Still more, when I look at their peculiar *views* of Christian doctrine, at their *theory* of an inherent divine constitution in the Church, at their entire system of transmitted powers for the efficacious administration of the sacraments,—at their affectation of a singular rigour in ecclesiastical observances and devotional exercises;—all this I regard with entire complacency, though I think them erroneous; for acting up to all this in their *own* practice, I respect them as far as they are sincere;—and, at all events, recognise their entire

* *NEWMAN'S Sermons*, vol. iii. p. 193—197.

† *SEWELL on Subscription*, p. 24.

right to uphold their views and observances among themselves.

But when I find them (as they consistently must do) putting forth an exclusive claim themselves to constitute "*the Church*," assuming a lofty tone of superiority, and condemning as heretics those who differ from them;—affecting the character of infallibility,—assuming the seat of judgment over their brethren, and as far as they have the power, following out their sentence to *actual persecution*, if not by personal infliction, yet by *invading rights and reputations*,* then the subject assumes a different aspect: then the system appears invested with a most reprehensible character, and stands most strongly condemned in its own consequences; and still more so, when I cannot help tracing, in sufficiently legible characters, (which it has been the object of the foregoing remarks to exhibit,) what is the actual nature and tendency of those views of Christian evidence and doctrine which they affect so scrupulously to "wrap up in reverent language," and to guard from the spirit of scrutinizing inquiry by which they are wounded and lacerated.

(28.) This system of concealment and "reserve in teaching," is, in fact, intimately connected with their claims to be the depositaries of an apostolic trust, the secret of the true doctrine, handed down to the Church. And it is at once curious and instructive to notice the manner in which this claim is supported. As in other instances which we have had occasion to notice, no-

* It may here be supposed I am alluding to the "persecution" of Dr. Hampden, and it may be alleged that it is, at at any rate, unfair to refer to what is now past and ended. I will merely observe, it is *not past and ended*. The persecution rages at this moment as furiously as ever: and it will *continue to do so*, as long as the enactment of 1836 is *allowed to remain* disgracing the Statute Book of the University.

thing can be more just, rational, or moderate, than the *general* exposition which they give of *first principles* and primary facts.

We may take for example the following passages from the work of one of the most acute and learned of the leaders of this school, already referred to.

"Since everlasting and unchangeable quiescence is the simplest and truest notion we can obtain of the Deity, it seems to follow that, strictly speaking, all those so called economies, or dispensations, which display his character in action, are but condescensions to the infirmity and peculiarity of our minds,—shadowy representations of realities which are incomprehensible to creatures such as ourselves."*

This view of the "economies" or dispensations, led to the mode of teaching, called "economical," by the early Fathers, who "endeavoured to connect their own creed with that of those they addressed, whether Jewish or Pagan, adopting their sentiments, and even language, as far as they lawfully could."† And this is traced to the adoption of the same principle in the teaching of the apostles. The "economy" is certainly sanctioned by St. Paul, in his own conduct. "To the Jews he became as a Jew, and as without law to the heathen:"‡ And again, "Our blessed Lord's conduct on earth abounds with the like gracious and considerate condescension to the weakness of his creatures."§

On these grounds the author proceeds to trace the system of primitive doctrine which it is his special object to uphold and enforce as the true faith of the Church at the present day.

If we look at these principles *in themselves*, nothing, it appears to me, can be more sound or just,—nothing

* NEWMAN'S *Arians*, p. 82. . . . † *Ibid.* p. 99. . . . ‡ *Ibid.* p. 72. . . . § *Ibid.* p. 85.

more important, when deeply considered, and judiciously applied to the interpretation of the sacred text,—nothing more extensively useful in enabling the student to obtain a rational grasp of the tenour and drift of the different discourses and writings both of the Apostles and their Divine Master, and for following out, in a clear and luminous exposition, the gradual process of the disclosure of the Gospel, in its real nature and practical simplicity, throughout its several steps, up to the concluding period when the canon of inspiration was finally closed.

Further; it is readily admitted, that the apostles in their writings refer to oral instructions given to their converts; and in some instances, (on which much stress has been laid,) use particular expressions, which certainly *may* be interpreted to refer to some formularies, or particular institutions, committed to the individual disciples. Such, for example, are the “form of sound words,” [ἡ ποτὶ πᾶσις ὑγιαίνοντων λόγος] the “good thing which was committed” to Timothy,* [παράκαταθήκη] and “the traditions” which the Thessalonians had been taught,† of which (supposing this interpretation allowed,) all we can say is, that they have not been preserved to us.

(29.) That the Apostles really concealed, disguised, or in any way compromised the whole and simple truth, “the whole counsel of God” which they “declared,” is directly contradicted by their own words,‡ as well as the manifest object of their mission, as fully characterized and set forth in their writings. That in the *mode*, and *form*, and *language*, in which they propounded their doctrine, they entirely adapted themselves

* 2 Tim. i. 13, 14.
Visitation Sermon.

† 2 Thess. ii. 15. On this point see Mr. KEEBLE's
‡ e. g.:—Acts xx. 20—27; Col. i. 25—28.

to those whom they addressed, is manifest as a *fact*, most important to the interpretation of their writings; and is every way most worthy of the divine goodness and wisdom by which they were guided. This, however, was soon construed into systematic reserve and artful compromise, and made the plea which authorized the successors of the Apostles to practise such concealments and accommodations of the truth at their own discretion. Those who early acquired the exclusive name and authority of "the Church," held possession of that sacred and secret deposit which the Apostles had bequeathed, in obvious security from refutation. To "the Church" it was intrusted, to be kept in reserve, and brought out only when circumstances especially required it. The precise dogmas of the orthodox faith were confessedly not to be read in the Apostles' writings, but really lay hid in their silence. Thus, by virtue of this celebrated "*Disciplina Arcani*,"* the tenets of any who ventured to oppose them were *unanswerably* proved *heretical*, and the Catholic faith was found to possess a more and more precise and metaphysical form. They had the power in their own hands; and with an ascendancy and a majority, it was easy by arts and practices, obvious even to men less skilled in the knowledge of human nature and the means of influencing it, to maintain that ascendancy, and advance it even to an exclusive dominion. In further aid of such designs, and exact consistency with this principle, the practice of *pious frauds* was extensively and even avowedly pursued. When employed in so holy a cause, the advocate of truth was justified, (according to St. Clement of Alexandria,) "as a physician for the good of his patients, in being false, or

* See Introd. to DR. HAMPDEN'S *Bampton Lecture*, p. 19.

uttering a falsehood, as the Sophists say.”* Above all, the grand principle of the possession of a *traditional secret doctrine*, to be disclosed only when wrung from them by the necessity of the case, and the corruptions of the faith by heretics, united with the claim of absolute authority to decide infallibly *what was heresy*; (a part and consequence of it;) soon led to the erection of the vast fabric of spiritual despotism, whose unrelenting persecution,† even to extermination, of all whom it decreed to be heretics, coupled with *the destruction of all heretical books*,‡ has transmitted to the present times the fame of “the Fathers” and the purity of “the Primitive Church,” enveloped in a glory of orthodoxy and sanctity which it has become profaneness to call in question, or disparage.

(30.) We need not look far to trace the causes which led to this state of things. The powerful bias of human nature towards a religion of infallible pretensions, a faith consisting in a mere assent to creeds, a worship of forms, and a service of external observances, of times and seasons, of “days and months and years,”§—the proneness to a superstitious reliance on the performance of the ceremony rather than on the spiritual influence,—to sanctimonious devotion rather than to moral purity,—acting upon the natural love of power and the disposition to arrogate authority, and, in turn, reacted upon by the institutions thus gradually enforced, would alone be sufficient, in the lapse of a very short time, to frame

* Quoted in NEWMAN’s *Arians*, p. 81.

† See EUSEBIUS, *Vit. Const.*, ii. 63.

‡ On this point the reader is referred to BEAUSOBRE’S *Hist. de Manichéisme*. The burning of books was particularly enjoined by the law of Arcadius, *Lex* 36, *De Hæret.*

§ Gal. iv. 10.

dogmatic systems out of the most simple religious instruction;—to erect a fabric of authority and infallibility out of the spiritual offices of Christian teachers; and to invest with an essential and permanent character, institutions originally but of a temporary and incidental nature.

It is in this superstitious spirit, so congenial to human nature, that the multitude of ceremonial observances and austerities have taken their rise, from the earliest ages. The Christian Church had but to follow the course indicated by the propensities of human infirmity, and its ordinances, however onerous or rigid, would be sure to find multitudes of devoted followers. In the text of the New Testament, it is allowed on all hands, we find no injunctions of this kind. The practices observed by the Jewish converts, whether as part of their law, or on other established authority, were allowed, continued, and even conformed to, guarding only against their abuse, by our Lord* and his Apostles:† thus, as *adaptations*‡ to the condition of the converts, the distinctions of meats,§ and of days,|| the observance of the sabbath,¶ and of fasting,¶ were permitted and upheld. But Christianity, *as such*, not only enjoined nothing of the kind, but in the Apostles' writings such ordinances were positively set aside.** In the earliest age, however, we find practices, the *very same in spirit* introduced. Nothing, indeed, was more easy or natural than the transition to a system recognising and sanctioning them, as soon as the Christian communities began to acquire a settled constitution. Many such practices crept in from the earliest times, and, by imperceptible degrees, acquired a character of sanctity. Thus, fasting and penances became merito-

* Matt. v. 17. † Gal. ii. 14. ‡ Mark ii. 27. § Rom. xiv. 3. || Ib. 5.

¶ Matt. vi. 16. ** Col. ii. 16, Rom. xiv. 17, and 1 Tim. iv. 8, &c.

rious; and, though with the actual observance of the sabbath by the Jewish converts before their eyes, they could not fall into the modern error of confounding it with the Lord's day; yet this commemorative festival was by degrees invested with a sort of holiness, in common with other days observed in celebration of the events of our Lord's life, and of the Apostles and eminent saints; together with seasons of abstinence and humiliation.

In the *text* of the New Testament, it is admitted, we nowhere find an *exclusive commission* to administer the sacraments, nor to perpetuate an order of ministers. But out of the simple institutions of Christ, his general promises of perpetual aid to his church, the peculiar powers conferred on his apostles, and some incidental regulations in the communities established by them, there was gradually erected a superstructure of a far different character. The more exalted doctrines of sacramental efficacy, of absolution, and of excommunication, were hardly separable from the claim to the exclusive commission of apostolic ordination to administer them, and to a continuation of the apostolic powers in the episcopal hierarchy. All these soon became (from obvious causes,) integral parts of the constitution of the church: and (by the aid of the *disciplina arcani*,) soon enjoyed the sanction of primitive tradition. *This* it was which fixed the *first link* in the chain of the much-boasted *apostolic succession*: a point important to be noticed, since the attention of disputants on both sides has been usually confined to the very subordinate object of tracing the *subsequent* links, which is a mere question of history.

(31.) Such are the principles and practices which distinguished orthodoxy of old; such the character of

ecclesiastical pretensions. And these are what are now attempted to be revived. But, further, it is peculiarly deserving of observation that the advocates of this system profess to put it forward, and urge it on public attention *with peculiar reference to the state of the present times, and the advance of intellectual illumination*. They are fond of referring to the scientific character of the age, and to the dispositions thus cherished they contend that their religious system is most peculiarly applicable.

Let the reader listen with due reverence to the following manifesto of "the Church," from its official organ:—"The age is all light: therefore the church is bound to be,—we will not say dark, for that is an ill-omened, forbidding word,—but we will say deep, impenetrable, occult in her views and character. Nay, we will not object to a certain measure of light, so that it be of the dim and awful kind. . . . But something of this kind we must have . . . a retreat from our too much light . . . a Church which protects herself from the powerful and noxious glare which settles upon her from without."* . . . "We are now assailed by science, and we must protect ourselves by mystery." . . . "Mystery fits in with this age exactly; it suits it; it is just what the age wants."†

This preposterous declaration can hardly, at first sight, appear otherwise than either (in one sense,) a singular and unexpected confession; a direct acknowledgment of the weakness of the cause; or (in another sense,) it might be set down as the mere impotent bravado of bigotry in its dotage. Yet on closer examination we shall find these notions chime in so well with some

* *British Critic*, No. 48, p. 395.

† *Ibid.* p. 397.

most prevalent views of religion, as to render their realization by no means chimerical, and if realized, destructive to all sound and rational belief.

For, let it only be observed, that there is no subject on which the generality (even of educated and reasoning persons,) are less given to reason than on religion. Hence the prevalent disposition (even among those who think deeply, and are perhaps profoundly engaged in philosophical investigations on other subjects,) is to avoid all such examination of religious matters;—to adopt nominally the established creed, without question; to dismiss all particular distinctions from their thoughts: or, if questioned, to recur to mystery, and repose in the incomprehensibility of the doctrine;—maintaining this, too, as in itself the most effectual and legitimate means of cherishing a due and becoming sentiment of religion. And all this grounded upon and vindicated by the favourite and fashionable idea, so grateful to human nature, that “religion is altogether a mere matter of feeling.”

Hence we readily see by what powerful support the advocates of Church authority must feel that their claims are backed. What are these prevalent dispositions and sentiments, but the very echo to their demands? What are these notions but the very counterpart of a system which shuts out reason with mystery, and appeals only to the vague emotion of faith and reverential devotion? And when we find a party rising up within the very bosom of the Church and the Universities, and even arrogating to itself the exclusive title of “the Church,” proclaiming aloud *the dissociation of religion and reason, of Christianity and its evidences*; avowing the uncongeniality of light, and flying to shelter itself in obscurity, and even pretending to address itself to the spirit of the present age, in this tone,—will it

appear extraordinary, if the result more than fulfils the expectations? Shall we be surprised that the spirit of the present age catches up the note, and responds with augmented testimony, to the inconsistency of religion with knowledge, the incompatibility of Christianity with intellectual advancement.

The professing Christian world, the nominal adherents to established forms, may "better the instruction," which is thus vouchsafed. If the Church deprecate inquiry, the worldly disciple may, in perfect consistency with a professed adherence to that Church, satisfy himself that Christianity cannot really stand inquiry. If the Church prohibit evidence, the disciple may indulge in scepticism, in implicit obedience to its mandate. Enlightened by the mystical traditional theories, if he find ordinary events made into miracles, he may regard miracles as ordinary events; if everything is miraculous, nothing is:—if he be taught that the Church is as much inspired as the Bible, he may interpret it that the Bible is as little inspired as the Church: and all this without any violation of his professions. And if "the Church" affect to suit the wants of the present age by the assumption of mystery, assuredly it will only be by providing it the more convenient and decent cloak to cover total unbelief and confirmed irreligion.

(32.) Here also I may stop to make one further remark, suggested by the passage last quoted, but in fact equally called forth by the common tenour* of the language held by the traditionists when they refer to the *advance of modern science*; viz., their expressed hostility to it, and complaints that their system is "assailed" by it.

* For further illustration see the *context* of the passage last quoted.

This is, in fact, a charge, the justice, or even meaning, of which, I am at a loss to comprehend. How any point of science comes into collision with the peculiar system of church authority, I do not see. Nor in the general spirit and temper of the scientific world in matters of religion, I am persuaded, can anything be found of a character peculiarly hostile to the traditional views. On the contrary, I am disposed to believe, that if there be any special tendency in scientific pursuits, as such, to influence the religious opinions of those who follow them, among the great body of scientific men, it is, for the most part, precisely that to which I before referred :—a disposition rather to *avoid* engaging in theological speculation, and reverentially to *acquiesce* in the established faith : the very spirit which the traditionists desire to cherish. Whilst I would venture to express my belief, that among the most eminently distinguished philosophers of the present day in this country, there exists even a profoundly religious spirit ; though certainly unaccompanied by any particular display of hostility towards the traditionists.

There is indeed one point, and one only, which in the existing state of science, and of religious knowledge, has been rendered prominent, and may be regarded under a hostile aspect. I allude (as may be anticipated) to the contradictions which the investigations of geology have brought to light :—contradictions between what we find to be the actual order in which the slow, gradual, and uninterrupted process of the formation of the crust of the earth, with its organized productions, has taken place ; and the representations given of one sudden and universal creation at a comparatively recent period in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The precise nature and evidence of this discrepancy, it is unnecessary

here to enter upon, as I have fully stated and discussed it in a former work.*

But in reference to this point, I do not see that it affords any ground for the complaint above referred to, as if, in this respect, "the Church" were "assailed by science." The contradiction is, indeed, one of a very marked and peculiar kind, and one which appears to me most important to be dwelt upon, and carefully and honestly scrutinized;—as peculiarly tending to call forth a deeper consideration and more just view of the real grounds on which Christianity rests, than, unhappily, is too commonly prevalent.

The direct consequences of the unquestionable establishment of this remarkable discrepancy (as I have shown at large in the place already referred to) may indeed be justly regarded as opposing fatal objections to the views of those who build their religion upon the literal application of the Old Testament, and adopt the obligation of the Sabbath, whether as derived from Genesis, or from the Decalogue. But this is a doctrine which I believe has little in common with that of the traditionists. "The Church," that is, the advocates of church authority, are surely the last who can consider their system endangered. Nay, even (with their acknowledged acuteness) it is surprising they do not, as they clearly might, turn this topic to account, in *favour* of their cause, as only evincing more clearly the unassailable independence of their principles. For tradition, reposing on its own authority, can well afford to dispense with that of Scripture, on any point: but more especially on one so totally unconnected with the peculiar tenets of "the Church," as the representation of

* *The Connexion of Natural and Divine Truth, &c.* London, J. W. PARKER, 1838. See especially Section iv. p. 253, &c., and Notes.

the creation, either in Genesis or the Decalogue, and the sabbatical institutions of the older dispensations grounded upon it.

CONCLUSION.

(33.) WHAT has been here advanced may, perhaps, suffice to exhibit the real tendency of the principles of the traditional school, when divested of those extraneous considerations to which we are naturally most led at first sight, from the external and apparent character of its pretensions, which undoubtedly bear a considerable resemblance to those of Romanism. But these outward manifestations are found really to cover principles of deeper import, with which they might seem little connected, and which are essentially mixed up with the very elements of religious truth.

Faith, being reduced to an act of obedience, loses all connexion with real conviction; all test of distinct evidence being abandoned, and all appeal to reason discarded, the only substitute is a mere vague feeling, or sentiment, common to all religions, true or false.

Truth implies conviction, and conviction evidence: a mere impression on the feelings or imagination requires neither. A faith founded on conviction and evidence claims the character of truth, a religion of mere reverence and submission owns no connexion with truth. A system which discards evidence, puts truth and fable on the same level. That which is treated as if it were fiction, will soon come to be regarded as such: that which has no better warrant than an appeal to veneration and antiquity, is undistinguishable from fiction. *THE REAL question is not one of THE REVIVAL OF POPERY, but of THE PRESERVATION OF THE VERY FOUN-*

DATIONS OF FAITH: whether religion shall be made to depend on the indulgence of feeling or the conviction of reason: whether belief shall be founded in prejudice or evidence: whether Christianity is based on fable or fact, on antiquity or truth.

To a simple believer in the written word of the New Testament, *the system of tradition* can appear in no other light than as *involving in entire ambiguity the landmarks of Christian truth*. It *does away*, by rendering *confused*, all distinctive characteristics of a *definite depository*, and *finally closed record of revelation*. By *neutralizing*, it *destroys* the whole evidence of the Gospel.

The plainest understanding feels the necessity for such evidences; yet in contending for this it is by no means intended that a real faith cannot subsist without a strict logical appreciation of the whole compass of these arguments. To insist on this would, of course, be to exclude the great mass of believers. Christianity, however, stands secure in the *multiplicity* of its evidences; and these adapted to every species and every grade of intellect and capacity. And that it does so is not among the least of the proofs of its divine origin. Each individual mind may find its difficulties in *one* class of proofs, but will fasten on *some other*, fully convincing to itself. The evidence to the ignorant, though *not the same*, is *equally strong*, as to the learned. But in every case it can be brought home to the conviction only by an honest use of the reasoning powers, according to the best of the ability given to each.

(34.) I have referred to such views of the evidences of Christianity as have been upheld by eminent divines, and are at least intelligible and satisfactory to the generality of believers.

But even if we make ample allowance for all the dif-

ficulties of the subject, and admit that arguments of this nature may have been pushed to too precise an application, or too exclusively insisted on by some writers, at all events a reasonable belief requires that there should be *somewhere* found a broad and unambiguous line of separation between that which *is* revelation and that which *is not*; some distinct authentication of the depository of inspired communications and divine truth.

This is the essential point in all discussion of the evidence of the New Testament: and to this point the learning and talents of the most eminent critics and divines of successive ages have been worthily dedicated. Their continued researches have fully confirmed, and brought home to *the present age*, the force of that evidence which enabled *contemporaries* to draw a distinct line, defining the canon of the New Testament.

This is *to us* the all-important point; and it is especially to be observed that this depends on no sentence or tradition of "the Church,"* either as independently divine, or, still less, as resting its claims on Scripture; that is, sanctioning its own authority, and a judge in its own cause; but *essentially on mere human and fallible testimony*, supported by the broad fact, that the writings of the New Testament were *attacked* by the earliest enemies of Christianity *as being* its authentic charter; and, still more, in the important circumstance that, *within* the pale of the profession of Christianity, these books were appealed to by those who were branded as "heretics," by the self-styled "orthodox," in their controversies; and either party charged the other with being *unscriptural*, and thought their case made out if they could substantiate the charge.

* The reader will find this point most ably and fully discussed in Dr. SHUTTLEWORTH's work on Tradition, p. 81, *et seq.* See also PALEY'S *Evidences*, Part I. chap. ix. sect. 7.

The essential object has thus been to preserve a well-marked boundary of the depository of the Christian Word in authentic written records. The bare suspicion of any other remnant of truth possessing the *same authority*, lurking in the words or institutions of any men or of any age, would be directly destructive to this object. For the preservation of the truth, no oral tradition could or did suffice. The best and most faithful of human stewards could not have preserved the sacred deposit absolutely pure and uncorrupt, much less the weak, and credulous, or ambitious, and unscrupulous men, who too generally obtained the ascendancy in the first ages. Outward institutions and forms could not serve as monuments of the primitive religion, as being perpetually liable to receive corrupt additions.

Of this enough has been shown in what was observed before. Against all such corruptions in faith or practice, the only resource can be found in the recurrence to a *determinate written record* alone authentic and authoritative. With the evidences of its authority before us, it is for human reason, with the resources of human learning, to discriminate and decide upon these evidences, and to ascertain the claim to a divine character in the written word, peculiar and incommunicable. Different as the case may have been in the apostolic age, at the present day nothing has preserved the same marks of authenticity as these sacred records. Further, the same authority has not been continued in any collateral channel to give an authoritative *interpretation of their contents*. This, therefore, can only be left to human judgment and individual opinion, diligently and humbly exercised, and availing itself of all attainable means and aids.

(35.) Nor will this be in the least incompatible with a general deference to the authority (confessedly unin-

spired,) of duly-constituted teachers, and the opinions of learned men.* But this is a totally different case from that we have been examining. A man *reasons fairly* in adopting such guidance, and may conscientiously trust to such a ground of assent, provided it be not taken up in culpable indifference or wilful negligence, nor unduly venerated and idolatrously relied upon, as if divine.

And further, this is no way opposed to the legitimate use of creeds and formularies, distinctly regarded as mere human synopses and fallible expositions, and subject always to a reference to the written word *alone*, for their interpretation and warrant. They must, I conceive, find their chief recommendation not in their *antiquity*, but in their *utility*; their claim to acceptance, not from their origin in *past* ages, but their adaptation to the wants of the *present*: and they ought always to be open to modification by competent authority, to disuse or renewal as circumstances may require. Nor, again, will all this be any disparagement to the observance of forms and ordinances of divine worship, on the undeniable and apostolic plea of decency, order, and edification: nor the recognition of an established ministry and hierarchy, adorned with rank or endowed with wealth, if the *state* may think it desirable: but pretending to no power to lay down *authoritatively* what is divine truth, or to exercise spiritual functions beyond the sanction of the written word.

(36.) The powerful tendency of human nature to repose in a nominal orthodoxy and conformity,—to merge all religious reflection in silent, uninquiring assent and acquiescence in authoritative dogmas, on the plea that

* See PROVOST OF ORIEL'S *Sermon on Private Judgment*, p. 22.

the subject is, in its nature, above the grasp of the human faculties,—habitually withdrawing the thoughts from it, and even claiming a certain merit in doing so:—The dislike of thought and inquiry, the desire of reposing on an infallible authority:—The proneness of men to rely on a strict adherence in profession, and at least a certain scrupulous show of conformity in practice, to external observances, as a ready mode of compounding for a worldly mind, and a careless, if not vicious life:—particularly the notion of *keeping* certain *days holy* to compensate for weeks of *unholy*, or at least worldly life. These are the elements of that fallacious and degrading kind of religion, so grateful to the weakness and blindness of the human heart. And in its prevalence a system like that we are considering finds its main strength: in such a soil it flourishes; and finds ready acceptance among the many, who are quite incompetent to examine or apprehend its higher principles.

As to the importance attached to the more precise ordinances and rigorous exercises, I shall merely observe, there has been always a strange propensity to concede to asceticism a reputation of peculiar sanctity, which is extremely delusive. Self-torment is very compatible with want of self-government; exercises imposed on the body with want of command over the mind. While all such observances have a direct tendency to nourish spiritual pride; in a Christian point of view, austerities are nowhere enjoined in the Gospel: at best, then, they are like Saul's offering,* or Martha's service.† Without presuming to judge those who follow such practices, we may fairly require of them not to judge us if we do not.

The dubious twilight of mystical devotion, and the vague apprehension of *unrevealed mysteries*, surely can-

* 1 Sam. xiii. 12; xv. 22.

† Luke x. 41.

not but seem greatly at variance with the very nature of Christianity, to those who regard it as fully and finally disclosed in the written word. If it be a plain announcement of the way of salvation, as such it must stand out alone, and apart from all doubtful speculations. If it be viewed as a simple declaration of necessary practical truths, addressed to the apprehension and convictions of all, according to the light given them, to however small an extent the truth is made known, it is, so far, *distinctly* made known. It may present but a limited region to the view : but that view, as far as it does extend, is clear and cloudless. All beyond it is, and must be, enveloped in impenetrable darkness. But that which *is* disclosed is perspicuous and undisguised : and with this *alone* it is that we are concerned ; with what may be hidden from us we have nothing to do. Religion to us *exists* only so far as it is *clearly revealed* ; the acknowledgment of this upon its proper evidence is faith ; the *suspicion* that there *may be* something beyond, with which we are yet concerned, is the spirit of mysticism.

To follow steadfastly what we are *assured* is the truth, and to shun as carefully what we *know* to be sinful, is rational religion :—to grope after what we *imagine may be* acceptable, and to tremble in the dark *lest* every step *should be* wrong, is superstition.

And further, if all the complex system of authority be essential to the orthodox faith, may it not well be objected, Is this like anything which can claim the appellation of the Gospel of Christ ? or be received by the simple believer as a charter of grace and immortality ? May it not be reasonably objected, In such uncertainty can there be discovered any positive announcement of the divine will ? in such perplexity any sure guide to revealed truth ? in such mysterious obscurity anything which can be called a divine revelation at all ?

(37.) In the writings of the New Testament we admit the absence of any *precise literal code* of doctrines or duties; yet we find the real elements of both: not indeed creeds, but comprehensive truths; not systematic laws, but practical principles and motives. There is manifest, throughout, a plea of truth, and an appeal to evidence, and consequently an appeal to the *convictions* of all readers; and no authority can force conviction; in its nature, it must be free, or it ceases to be conviction. Thus, though there neither is, nor can be, consistently with the New Testament, any authority to decide what is true doctrine, and what is heresy, or to claim spiritual dominion over *others*, yet, as all real faith is grounded on conviction, there does, and must, exist in every man, fallible as he is, such a power to determine the truth *for himself*; not merely as a right, but as a duty; not merely as a privilege, but as an obligation.* His own conscientious conviction, imperfect as it *may* be, but *free* as it *must* be, exercised according to the best of the ability given him, whether great or small, thus becomes *sacred* to *him*. It is that by which he must be guided in the most intimate connexion with his own personal responsibility: *not* a responsibility (as has been unintelligibly contended,) of the *understanding*; but of the *will*, to preserve the honest use of the understanding. And if the inevitable *varieties* of private judgment be objected, as inconsistent with the *unity* and invariableness of truth, —I reply,—truth is indeed *one* and *invariable*, but it not only may, but must, be seen under *different aspects*, and with *different degrees of clearness* by different minds. To each it is realised, as far as the nature of the case permits, if he seek and receive it honestly to the *best* of

* See the PROVOST OF ORIEL'S *Sermon on Private Judgment*, especially p. 17, &c., and JORDAN'S *Reply to Fausset*, p. 16.

his ability;* not resting satisfied in any attainment,† but continually striving to advance and improve. The measure of that ability, and the light vouchsafed, may be more or less. Christianity looks only to an improvement *proportional*‡ to the means granted; a constantly progressive *advance*.§ It assures the disciple that increase of grace and light will always be given, if properly sought,||—that every one has enough given him to profit by,—to judge for *himself*, but not to *judge others*. ¶

* 2 Cor. viii. 12.

† Phil. iii. 13. Heb. vi. 1.

‡ Matt. xxv. 14.

§ 2 Peter iii. 18.

|| John vii. 17. James i. 5.

¶ Phil. ii. 3, 12, 14.

THE END.

